

Other fields



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claimed over 400 lives, with hundreds more missing.

When he first suggested the ban, many people in the movement said it was impossible since logs and wooden products were vital exports. However, in January 1989, the Chatichai Choonhavan administration issued a royal decree to ban logging nationwide.

He is the first environmentalist in the country to look deeply and seriously at the energy sector. While many advocates joined mass rallies, such as those of the Pak Mool villagers to oppose the Pak Mool Dam, and the Bo Nok and Hin Krud people to oppose coal-fired power plants, Witoon became a part of the movement by studying the energy sectors of the country. He came up with scientific data to confirm that the forecast for energy demand by the Energy Policy and Planning Office was too high compared with the economic growth of the country.

Though he could not stop the Pak Mool Dam, his campaign sparked the interest of the public who started to question the real energy demand of the country.

In 2001 he was selected by community advocates to be one of 99 members of Thailand's National

Economic and Social Advisory Council. Here his voice was louder.

Though the government never listens to the voice of the council, the Energy Policy and Planning Office eventually agreed to reduce the energy reserve margin from 25 per cent to 20 in the country's Power Development Plan for 2004-2015.

Unlike many other environmental advocates, Witoon believes that only the people have the power to take action against a

development project and protect the natural resources of the country. He hopes that people power can change the policies that have aggressively exploited natural resources. That is why the soft-spoken Witoon, who prefers to call himself an ecology advocate, is rarely seen at the forefront of any movement to oppose a policy or development project that exploits nature.

He realised that to make the voice of the environmental movement heard by the government

and society at large, and to keep the movement alive, merely protesting against a development project is not a wise strategy. An alternative must be provided, for instance, reducing the energy consumed to replace the construction of a large dam project or community forest. For Witoon, there is always an alternative way to "develop" without exploiting natural resources.

Because nature does not have borders like the

Towards Ecological Recovery and Regional Alliance in 1991. The alliance aims to build an understanding and awareness of the environment for people in countries that lack a civil society.

Since then he has become the fiercest enemy of the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, which are financial supporters of the Nam Theun 2 Dam project in Laos.

The dam will generate electricity and sell it to Thailand.

To oppose the project, Witoon and his allies studied all aspects of the dam and its impact on the environment and the people living there, particularly ethnic minorities, as well as its energy consumption and the economy. He then informed the world about the impact. The controversy over the project continued from the time it was initiated in 1993.

However, it ended early last year when construction of the dam began after having a US\$1.3 billion (Bt50 billion) loan approved, along with a guarantee from the two financial institutions several years ago.

"I have failed, but at least our attempt encouraged Lao villagers to become aware of their rights and realise the impact of the dam on their lives and the environment," he said. ■

He realised that after Thailand became more open, with a more aware society, the government had to move on to exploit the resources of neighbouring countries such as Laos and Burma which share the Mekong River and forest land with Thailand.

territory of a country, Witoon does not limit his work to Thailand. He realised that after Thailand became more open, with a more aware society, the government had to move on to exploit the resources of neighbouring countries such as Laos and Burma which share the Mekong River and forest land with Thailand.

With this awareness of exploitation in neighbouring countries, knowing its effects would eventually reach Thailand, he expanded his work to cover the region by setting up the